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THE ALARM of FIRE IMPROVED.

THE
SUBSTANCE OF A
SERMON,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH,

Of High-Wycombe, Bucks,

ON

SUNDAY, the 15, of SEPTEMBER, 1799,

By the REV. W. B. WILLIAMS, *N*

CHAPLAIN TO THE MARQUIS OF DOWNSHIRE.

Sound an Alarm in my Holy Mountain. Joel, xi. 1.

By Fire will the Lord plead. Isa. lxvi. 16.

HIGH-WYCOMBE:

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1800.

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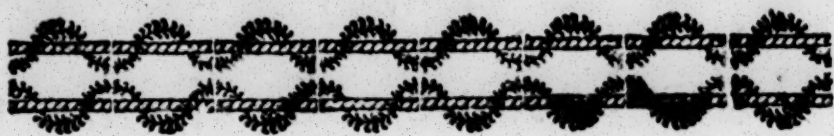
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SHOULD the following pages circulate beyond the neighbourhood, in which the circumstance that occasioned them occurred, it may be necessary here to premise, that they have their foundation from the *alarm of Fire*, communicated by the *ringing of the Market-bell*, during the time of Divine Service on the preceding Sabbath.

• While the Author sincerely sympathizes with a respectable inhabitant in the *loss* he has sustained, it is his earnest prayer
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it may become eternal *gain* to many, by awakening a serious concern as to the things of another world. If the cities of the plain suffering the vengeance of fire were instanced by an Apostle, after so many centuries had elapsed, no apology can be necessary from a Christian Minister, who desires to convert alarm to activity, and consternation to profit; by improving so recent a circumstance, to those purposes for which it seems calculated.

High-Wycombe, }
18th Sep. 1799. }

A SERMON, &c.

DEUT. v. 5.

—Ye were afraid by reason of the *Fire*.

WHO can tell *what a day may bring forth**? many a blooming flower glittering in the morning dew, has in the evening been cut down, dried up and withered†. Many an eye beholds the rising sun, which ere it sets, is closed in death. *All things come to an end*; “but when or where,” is known only to Him, who numbers our days, and decrees the bound of our habitation.

To accomplish his designs, Creation waits attentive. Their language is, *here we are*‡. *Fire and hail, snow and vapour*—the pelting storm—the rapid flood—the boisterous wind—the trembling earth—the devouring *flame*—all are at hand

* Prov. xxvii. 1. † Psalm xc. 6. ‡ Job xxxviii 35.

hand to *fulfil his word** ; and the venerable pile which unmoved has stood the adverse shock of many ages, suddenly becomes a *ruinous heap* †. To-day, it may point its turrets to the skies ; to-morrow bows its lofty head, and lays its honours in the dust.

Reflections of this nature, are congenial to the serious and reflecting mind ; and they will arise from every instance of the brevity of sublunary existence, the uncertainty of human enjoyment, and the instability of terrestrial power. When *God's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants are to learn righteousness* ‡ ; and whether the dispensation be more or less tremendous, whether the stripes be few or many, they proceed from the same hand, and we are called upon to *consider the rod and who has appointed it* || ; thus too, shall we in our measure and degree, imitate his example, who improved each passing scene, by pouring instruction on the untutored mind, and consolation into the drooping heart.

From

* Psalm cxlviii. 8. † Isa. xxv. 2. ‡ xxvi. 9.

|| Micah, vi. 9.

From the recital of the text, you have probably anticipated my design, which is to convert the alarm and interruption experienced in this Church last Lord's-day afternoon, to present and lasting benefit. May God succeed the endeavour! may the sound of the Market-bell, remind us of the awful sound of the Arch-Angel's Trumpet; and the cry of *fire*, be the means of putting a cry into your hearts, to escape that fire which can never be quenched!

The words just read, are part of *the words of Moses, the man of God, King in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together**; and he is here reminding them of that memorable occasion, when the Great God—in thunder and lightning—with the sound of a trumpet—and with all the astonishing grandeur of an Almighty Legislator, on Mount Sinai promulged his law—*Hear O Israel the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep them, and do them. The Lord our God made a*
covenant

* Deut. xxxiii. 5.

covenant with us in Horeb, the Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. The Lord talked with you face to face in the Mount, out of the midst of the fire. I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to shew you the word of the Lord; for ye were afraid by reason of the fire.*

I confess my intention of using this last clause in an *accommodated* sense; but I trust nothing will be advanced, but what is agreeably to the *analogy of faith*, and warranted in the book of God. The "*Israelites were afraid*"—and so were many of the inhabitants of Wycombe—"BY REASON OF THE FIRE."

To assist memory by observing method, let us attempt under the following arrangement of our thoughts, to render them more clear, and abiding. The text contains three things; we have,

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|------|-------|---------------------------------------|
| I. | } The | { Passion— <i>Fear</i> . |
| II. | | { Agent— <i>Fire</i> . |
| III. | | { Motive— <i>By reason of &c.</i> |

First. We are to enquire into the nature of that *passion* of the human mind, called "FEAR".

* Verse, 1—5.

First, We are to enquire into the nature of that *passion* of the human mind, called "FEAR."

This is a passion, to which we are subject since the fall of our first parent, and representative ; while there was no *sin*, there was no *fear* in the world : above, was heavenly contemplation ; within, was peace ; around, security and subjection ; man had every thing to hope, but nothing to dread ; God was his friend, and all creation his willing servants ; but no sooner had *Adam* sinned, than *he was afraid*, he fled ; and when he heard the voice of God*, *hid himself among the trees of the garden* : his posterity, born after his fallen likeness†, partake of his disposition—they experience *fear* ; which is strictly speaking, trouble and uneasiness of mind, arising from the apprehension of approaching evil, or impending danger.—I read in scripture, of natural or

1. *Bodily fear*. — This occasions great trouble of mind, and perturbation of heart. *Fear hath torment*†. In proportion to the danger, is generally the fear, and distraction

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* Gen. iii. 10. † V. 3. † 1 John, iv. 18.

tion of the human frame. If it be exceeding great, reason is often thrown from the helm and can flee no farther. "This was the conduct of the mariners (in the spiritual conflict, exemplified by a storm at sea) in the 107 psalm, *all wisdom was swallowed up* ; and this is the experience of some sincere followers of Christ : whether from constitution or habit, they in this respect, almost resemble the *wicked, who flee when no man pursueth**." This fear, if it be not criminal, is nevertheless so distressing, and withal so detrimental, that every lawful means should be used to remove it. Consider, that bodily fear, exposes to bodily *danger*—it can do you no good—it may be premature—it perhaps is groundless ; at all events, it tends to destroy the energy of thought, and to deaden the efforts of exertion.—Perhaps, there were many such timorous souls, at the foot of this burning mountain.

2. *Slavish fear*.—This, like false wisdom, is *earthly, sensual, and devilish†* : it is the consequence of guilt, and the apprehension of punishment ; it is the fear of the

* Prov. xxviii. 1. † James, iii. 15.

the *slave* who dread the lash, not of the *Son* who deprecates infinitely more his father's frown; it is the trembling of the miserable *man*, not of the miserable *sinner*; it is consistent with the love of sin, to which he returns when the penal evil is removed, or when he is able to silence his conscience in the noise of company, or drown his fears in the entertainments of sense. Thus *Pharoah* feared *Moses*—*Adonijah* feared *Solomon*—*Ahab* feared *Elijah*—*Belshazzar* feared *Daniel*—*Herod* feared *John*—and *Felix* trembled at the preaching of Paul; but it seems, that all these characters, conquered their fears; and after a time, the *same truths* were heard, without the *same influence*: *Felix* heard again, but it does not appear, that he trembled any more—I mean any more *on earth*; for in hell, all believe, and tremble* for ever!—where is the congregation free from such characters? *They* were then, around the hill of *Sinai*.

3. *Legal* fear.—This is peculiar to the spot of which we are speaking, for it is none other than a *fearful looking for and*

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expectation

* James, ii. 19.

expectation of fiery indignation *; on account of our violation of the commandments of God. The law *curse every one who continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them*†: the gospel reveals, and the spirit applies this curse to the conscience, by evincing that *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*. I apprehend, the speaker in the text, had as much personal courage and cool intrepidity, as any man or prophet before, or since; yet even Moses, *did exceedingly quake and fear*‡. And why? Because, *sin by the commandment became exceeding sinful*||, and the law instead of being the ministration of life became the ministration of death§: he saw something of the purity of its nature—the extent of its demands—and the perpetuity of its obligation: if Abraham had the gospel preached unto him^b under the type and veil, so had Moses; for *he spake of Christ*: Every bleeding victim, pointed to the *Lamb slain before the foundation of the world*; and every command of the two tables, is as a *schoolmaster to lead us to Christ*,

* Heb. x. 27. † Gal. iii. 10. ‡ Heb. xii. 21.
 || Rom. vii. 13. § 2 Cor. iii. 7, 8. ^b Gal. iii. 8.

Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth.*—
All the true Israel, trembled, as Moses did.

3. *Evangelical fear.*—God's regenerate people are the only recipients of this. "It consists in deep humiliation on account of sin, accompanied with a degree of self-renunciation; with a longing for the favor, resemblance, and the presence of God in the soul; a fear of offending Him on any point; and a hearty desire of loving Him better, and serving him more. This fear, few of the Israelites seem to have had, nor is it alluded to in the text; but it is that which *Moses* experienced, and which so far from being censured, is expressly commended in the bible: for *to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole of man†*, and in this sense, *blessed is the man that feareth always‡*; for thus saith the Lord, *I will put my fear in their hearts, I will not go from them, and they shall not depart from me‡*.—The Israelites in deed § throughout the world, set to their seal^h, that that these things are true.

But besides this spiritual fear, which is
one

* Gal. iii. 24, 25. Rom. x. 4. † Eccles. xii. 13.

‡ Prov. xxviii. 14. † Jer. xxxiii. 40. § John, i. 47.

^h John iii. 33.

one mark of our being born again of God, a believer sojourning upon earth is liable to fears partly natural, legal, and evangelical, which you will permit me to call heterogenous, or

4. *Mixed fear.* “ To this the Apostle might allude where he said, *our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side, without were fightings, and within were fears*†. Such as anxious doubtings—painful misgivings—dread of death—apprehension of being rejected at the last—and all the long train of evil surmises arising from our remaining unbelief. If our *faith* could be perfected, our *fears* would be cured; but, while there is *weakness* in our faith, there will be *strength* in our fears.”

Such seems to me, the scriptural account of *fear*. It was produced in the breasts of the surrounding multitude at Sinai, through the agency of *fire*, which was the second topic of discussion.

II. An agent—“FIRE.”—*Fire* in itself, simply considered, as one of the elements, may perhaps be deemed the most tremendous.

* 2 Cor. vii. 5. Toplady on the text.

dous. How subtil in its nature, how rapid its progress, how astonishing its force ! in effect, it is the instrument of *heat, light, and motion*; without fire, all bodies would become immoveable ; as in a severe winter we actually see our fluids become solid for want thereof: without *fire*, a man would harden into a statue; and the very air we breath, would cohere into a rigid mass.

Fire, then, is the universal cause of all mutation or change ; for all mutation is by motion, and all motion is by *fire* ; But waving philosophical remarks, let us take a *scriptural* view of some things suggested unto us mediately or typically, under the figure of this wonderful phenomenon, to which, the destruction of the great globe itself is consigned : it was once deluged with with a flood, it shall finally be devoured by *fire**.—I read of an earthly, heavenly, and a hellish flame. There is,

1. The fire of *earth*.—This is either *material* or *spiritual*. The *former*, blazes on the winter's hearth, and the poor blind idolater

* 2 Peter, iii. 7, &c.

idolater though he could not see the folly of worshipping part of the wood he burnt, felt its influence, when he exclaimed *Aha, I am warm. I have seen the fire**: this generally speaking, is too obvious to need illucidation; of the latter, hear the description given by an apostle—*behold how great a matter, a little fire kindleth! and the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body; and setteth on fire the whole course of nature†*. God keep us from this, and every similar flame! from the fire of slander—the arrows of envy—the coals of jealousy‡—the blaze of persecution—the fiery faggots of mystical Babylon drunk with the blood of the Saints; and under whose feet embers yet smoke, in the ashes of the Martyrs burnt for the testimony of Jesus§.

Still there is a sense in which this fire, like every other dispensation is over-ruled in mercy, to the believing soul. If you are *chosen in the furnace of affliction||*, it is that you may be *refined as the silver,*
and

* Isa. xliv. 16. † James, iii. 5—6. ‡ Cant. viii. 6. § Rev. vi. 9. || Isa. xlviii. 10.

and come forth as the pure gold†. The servants of the most high are never left alone in their troubles; the great refiner is always at hand to abate the heat, so that it may destroy nothing but their dross. The three children were not left in their extremity, though Nebuchadnezzar ordered the fire to be heated for them, one seven times more than for ordinary offenders, since even the smell of fire did not pass over them; neither were they solitary—for Lo! said the King, I see four men loose in the midst of the fire, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*

2. The fire of *heaven*.—This in scripture language is sent in judgment, and in mercy. We are told of the fire of the Lord consuming *the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah*, and deluging their fertile country with brimstone. This also *came forth from the Lord and destroyed the 250 men*, who with unhallowed hands usurped the priest's office, offering strange incense before the Lord|| This too, consumed the fifties who would touch God's anointed prophet *Elijah*, and do him harm‡.

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But

† Job, xxiii. 10. § Mal. iii. 3. * Dan. iii. 1—25.
 || Numb. xvi. 1—35 ‡ 2 Kings i. 10.

But I would rather trace it, as that, which though *as a wall of fire** to the adversaries, appears as a *pillar* and mark of approbation to the Israel of God†. This is that holy lambent flame which like the Sun in the firmament, gladdens by its splendor, and invigorates by its heat. It was this, that favoured *Abel's* offering—confirmed *Abraham's* faith—rebuked *Manoah's* fears—strengthened *Solomon's* hope—and confirmed *Elijah's* expectation. It was this, *spiritually*, which taken from the altar Christ, was a *living coal* to the lip of the rapt *Son of Amoz*‡; it was this, refined fire, that kindling in the heart of the Son of Jesse burst into an holy flame, and made him indite such wonderful *things touching the King Jesus*§. 'Twas this that shortened the journey to *Emmaus*, (for where the Saviour is, there is neither want, nor fatigue, nor pain,) and made them cry out, *Did not our hearts burn within us*||?. This flame is *unseen*, but it is not *unfelt* even in our day; Say Believer, Has it not ere this descended on thy sacrifice? met together in the house

* Zech. ii. 5. † Exod xiv. 20. ‡ Isa. vi. 4.

§ Pla. lxxxix. 5. xlv. 1. || Luke, xxiv. 32.

house of God, has not the Lord descended as of old time, and taken us up in the fiery car of love almost to hear the golden harps, and see the blifs of angels? The waters of affliction, though filling our trenches, have in a moment been dried up*; the hallowed flame has ran amongst us; and, *or ever we were aware, our hearts have been like the chariots of Amminadib* † !

Let me not forget to instance, that this flame in a peculiar manner descended on the apostles, *when the day of Pentecost was fully come* ‡. It is the flame of devotion, of purity, and of love; and it may be known by its invariable property—it always *ascends* to the throne of God from whence it came.

But we must in our meditations, come down from the mountain to the valley—even to the *valley of Hinnom*, to *Tophet* ordained of old, the *pile whereof, is fire and much wood* §.—We must descend to *blood and fire and pillars of smoke* ||; we have to speak—blessed be God, that it is not from personal experience of—

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3. The

* Cant. vi. 12. † Acts, ii. 1. 3: ‡ Isa. xxx. 33.
§ Joel, ii. 30. || Isa. xxxiii. 14.

3. The fire of *hell*.—Its characteristic I take to be, *heat without light*: we have already intimated that though kindled in the lowest hell, in a sense it burns even upon earth. It is also, methinks, peculiarly distinguished *here* by the flame of false doctrine; and *hereafter* it will be fed by the fuel of lost souls. *Who amongst us shall dwell with devouring fire? Who can endure the everlasting burnings*?* What says our Lord in reference to this? *If thy hand, thy foot, thine eye, if thy beloved lust which to thee is as such, off nd thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee; it is better for thee that thou shouldest enter into life halt or maimed, than to be cast into hell, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched†.* God keep us from this dreadful lake; from the Devils in all their rage, and Hell in all its horrors! may we never but at a distance, behold the burden of their chains, the fierceness of their flames, and the stench of their burnings! “O Lord most holy! O God most mighty! O holy and most merciful Saviour, Thou worthy Judge eternal, deliver us not

● Isa. xxxiii. 14. † Mark, ix. 43. 50.

not into these bitter pains of everlasting death ! ” —

We shall now proceed to enquire into the cause of that *fearfulness and horrible dread*, which seems to have pervaded *the tents of Jacob*. In other words, for this fear there was

III. A *motive*. “ BY REASON OF *the fire*,” evidently implying it was not an unfounded alarm, and for which they could not assign a cause : but as I have already solicited some latitude of interpretation, rather let me enquire, “Why did the ringing of the market-bell, last Sabbath-day, occasion such disturbance among the worshippers in this place ? — and, while the enquiry is making, let us include another idea, “whether there be not cause *every Sabbath*, of much *greater fear* ? ”

Your motives are at hand, in the first instance. The bell caused consternation in the breasts of many, because the sound was

1. *Sudden*. — Had the event been notified, it would have been expected ; had it been expected, it would have been provided against : the Master of the house would

would most probably have been on the spot, his servants attending, and every precaution taken, that prudence could foresee, or vigilance perform. Our divine Instructor applies this spiritually : *Ye know not what hour your Lord doth come ; but know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and not suffered his house to be broken up†. And what says the apostle ? When they shall say peace, peace, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape ‡.*

As unexpected, and still more so than the ringing of our market-bell can ever be, will be the sound of the Arch-angel's trumpet. For as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the Ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all : Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, &c. || — The Sun that rose in splendor, set in blood : never, perhaps shone a brighter

† Matth. xxiv. 42—43. ‡ 1 Thes. v. 2—3.

|| Luke, xvii. 27, &c.

brighter morn; never succeeded a darker night. *Abraham looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and to the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace*†!—The sound in our ears was local, and imported that the danger was

2. *Near*.—Sound, however great, may, from intervening space, sink in silence on the ear. Dangers at a distance, like all other objects diminish: things must be brought near, in order to be seen, heard, and felt. When the children of Israel beheld Mount Sinai *afar off*, it appeared as all other mountains; they had no thought of the cloud; it was not until they *drew near* that *they perceived, that the mount burned with fire*§.—The sinner has no idea of the Law of God, when before his eyes as an extended prospect; it must be brought home to his heart!

The danger communicated to our ears, was not only sudden and near, but it communicated something, very

3. *Unusual*.—We have heard the same signal repeatedly each market-day, it then

† Gen. xix. 23,—28. § Deut. iv. 11.

then vibrates without causing any alarm. And even at the time alluded to, a stranger to our customs might have passed through the town without participating in the dismay and yet it sounded the *same* note to *him*, as it did to *us*. Why did it produce a different effect?—the alteration was not in the instrument, but in the hearer; *we* connected certain peculiar ideas; there was, a *motive*.

May we not take up our parable to such, as disregard the gospel's *joyful sound* †? "The trumpet of God is sounding abroad," salvation to the chief of sinners, through the atoning blood and perfect righteousness of our incarnate Jehovah Jesus: It gives one clear, distinct, decisive, *certain sound* ‡, which goes out into all lands and unto the ends of the earth ¶; and the glorious gospel is like its divine Author, immutably *the same*, yesterday, and to day, and for ever§.

But the *same* sound, has a different *significancy*. The same voice may inspire comfort or dismay—the dream may be similar, as in the case of the two servants of

† Psalm, lxxxix. 15. ‡ 1 Cor. xiv. 8. ¶ Psa. xix. 3. § Heb. xiii. 8.

of the King of Egypt, while the interpretation is evidently different : when the Lord calls, some like *Samuel* will answer, *Speak for thy servant heareth**; while others, like the *deaf adder* stop their ears to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely†; in plain terms, the sinner having ears, hears not : it is not until these deaf ears become unstopped, that he perceives an unusual sound in the same instrument. When this takes place, what once vainly inspired victory, now announces defeat; what once gladdened, now dispirits; what once revived hope, now almost communicates despair :—*strange things‡*, are brought to his ears.

Such has been the experience of thousands. Hear *St. Paul's* account—not of another man, but of *himself*; mark how he once heard, and how he now felt. *I was alive without the law once—I had no idea that Saul the pharisee, could ever become Paul the chief of sinners—but when the commandment came with the power of God to the heart, sin revived and I died§*—died to all legal hope : and

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* 1 Sam. iii. 9. † Psa. lviii. 4. ‡ Acts, xviii. 20.
§ Rom. vii. 9.

he never *lived* afterwards, otherwise than by *faith upon the Son of God*†.

My hearer, have thy deaf ears been thus opened to attend the curse from yonder mountain? has the sense of condemnation brought thee on thy knees before the King of heaven; and has the sound of pardon, set thee on thy feet, before this *prince of peace*? hast thou pleaded guilty at the throne of grace, in order to thine acquittal at the throne of judgment? *marvel not at this alteration, this unusual change, for the hour now is, when they who are in the graves of sin Hear the voice of the Son of man and live*†.—The motive connected with the sound, was

4. *Interesting*.—The cry of “*fire*,” awakens a peculiar and general *interest* at its first announcement, in every breast susceptible of the feelings of humanity. For a time the concern is heightened, since generally speaking, no one can tell, but the calamity may be *his own*; nor can he ascertain how great the loss may be. Now, transfer the idea—when *the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven in flaming fire*§, What an *interest* will then be excited!

† Gal. ii. 20. † John, v. 28. § 2 Thes. i. 7.

cited ! we may now *feel* for our neighbours, but we must then *answer* for ourselves. At the burning of a house or mill, there may be, uninterested spectators ; some are so poor, that they have nothing to lose on earth ; but every man has that rich treasure his *soul* which must be redeemed, or perish everlastingly : others live so remote from the scene of danger as to have scarcely any knowledge or care in the transaction ; *but the wings of the morning* † cannot carry us out of the jurisdiction of that court, in which every man will have a cause to be tried. Here, losses may be calculated, evils mitigated, comforts return ; but who can describe the worth of the *soul*, or estimate *its* loss ? every thing else, may be replaced in a degree, by future industry and care ; *Jerusalem* may yet be built, and *Judah* may be restored — A city now in flames, may arise in greater splendor ; but who can repair *this* tenement when in ruins ? — The soul *once* lost, is lost *for ever* !

From such considerations, you will readily admit, that a fire of this description must be

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† Psa. cxxxix. 9.

5. *Alarming.*

5. *Alarming* — *If a beast but touched the mountain it died**; and we all know something of the effect of fire in general. We lately saw terror marked on many countenances, “ye were afraid by reason of the fire.” Would to God, there were the same dread of the fire of hell! O that you might *fear* its flame in time, lest you feel its *fury* to all eternity!

And is there not ground of alarm? the sinner is already suspended over the infernal pit, and hangs by a brittle thread, which he is daily endeavouring to cut! what says our Lord? *Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*†. Ah, hardened rebel! dost thou jest with *hell*, and sport with *damnation*? “thy guardian angel weeps”! darest thou provoke the wrath of heaven? be warned, be assured, that though thy heart be hard, it must break; though thy resolution be firm, it will fail; Thou mayest now be seduced to *believe thy own lie*‡, and think there is neither God nor devil, heaven nor hell; but the time is at hand, *when there shall be*
signs

* Heb. xii. 20. † Matth. x. 28 ‡ 2 Thes. ii. 11.

signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity the sea and the waves roaring, mens hearts failing them for fear†: Then, the flame which already burns under thy feet, will burst over thy head; and the mightiest of the sons of men, will cry to the rocks and the mountains, to cover them, and hide them from the face of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand‡!

Our time forbids an enlargement.—The sound we heard was sudden, in point of notice; unusual, in its significance; interesting, from situation; and alarming, from probable consequences.

What lessons of instruction are deducible from this “warning voice from heaven”? what, from this, and every similar dispensation of providence, may we learn by way of general

IMPROVEMENT?

Use I. *Sympathy*.—It is the character of a mad-man to scatter fire brands||, and pretend it is *in sport*; and none but a child of the devil will delight in mischief: humanity, will ever lend an ear to the voice

† Luke, xxi. 25. ‡ Rev. vi. 17. || Prov. xxvi. 19.

voice of distress, but it is the genius of christianity to enter into its feelings, to say, *Who is weak and I am not weak†?*—and to *mourn with them that mourn.* Thus *Jesus wept ‡* at the grave of *Lazarus*, and when he beheld the walls of *Jerusalem* doomed to dust and ashes ||.

2. *Candour.*—On occasions of public calamity, or private loss, there have not been wanting those who judge very uncharitably; and hesitate not to deem that, a visitation in wrath, which the wise man informs us *comes alike to all, to the righteous and to the wicked §.* This is a conduct, which our Lord pointedly condemns, for, when “*there were present some who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, Jesus answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem?*”

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† 2 Cor. xi, 29. ‡ John, xi. 35. || Luke, xix. 41.
§ Eccles. ix. 2.

*I tell you Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."**

3. *Thankfulness.*—In the present instance, blessed be God the greatest mercy was evidenced in the midst of judgment. This is one of the uses we are to make of the providence ; and it was the want of this, that the Lord reproves, when he says, *I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning ; yet have ye not returned unto me saith the Lord †.*

But how much greater cause of thankfulness, is there, when we consider our deliverance in a *spiritual* sense ? All of us, by nature, are fit only for the burning, but some have been in the flame ; the brands have been almost burnt||, when the Lord Jesus Christ has plucked them from destruction, and rendered them objects of grace.

4. *Watchfulness.*—Let it not be deemed trivial, if all be excited to be very careful of this element, which has been truly stiled faithful as a servant, while merciless

as

* Luke, xiii. 1—5. † Amos, iv. ii. || Zech. iii. 2.

as a master ; but how much more necessary to be on our *watch tower*, against the fire which burneth from the lowest hell ; and to wait the bridegroom's approach ! and who were thus employed ? one *leper cleansed*, was in the temple worshipping, and praising God ; but where were the other *nine* ? some hundreds were at their post last Sabbath—and where we should not be ashamed to be found had the Judge of quick and dead appeared ; but where were the *thousands* who inhabit this town and parish ? Alas ! *Tell it not in Gath*, the great majority were acting in impious defiance of one of God's positive commandments †, and had they died in that state must have lift up their eyes in that flame, which can never, never be quenched.

Where was *Negotio* ? posting his books, casting his account of debtor and creditor ; scrupulously exact that there should be no mistake with man, but little thinking of his own long arrear, and the future reckoning with *his Lord*. Where was *Agricola* ?

§ Luke, xvii. 17. † And yet these are the persons, in general, who hope to enter into life by keeping the commandments !!

Agricola ? These are the *weeks of harvest*, and he was in the fields, beholding the bending grain, and anticipating its precious fruits already gathered into the barn : yet he knew not, but that while he *sees with his eyes, he may never taste thereof* †. Where was *Levis* ? trifling away his time, or taking an evening doze ; forgetting that *time is a talent* for which he must give an account, and that the unbelieving and *unprofitable* have alike their part *in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone* ||. I pass over those employed in direct acts of profligacy, and in sins *not to be named amongst christians*—I would pass from others, to *myself* ; O my soul, Where wast *thou* ? True it is, we were in the posture and in the place of *prayer*—but were we exercising the gift and grace ? Here were our *bodies*, but where were our *souls* ? Were we spiritual, or carnal worshippers ‡ ? What would have been the consequence to *us*, Had the interruption been occasioned, by the cry, that *time should be no longer* § ? What, had we beheld our God in judgment, and the world in flames !

¶

God

† 2 Kings, vii. 2. || Rev xxi. 8. | ‡ John, iv. 23. § Rev. x. 6.

God help us, to *watch and pray* ; and to answer the important question to our *soul's* satisfaction ! if we cannot, Suffer me yet further to improve the subject by enforcing the next lesson it teaches, namely

5. *Preparation*.—It is the part of a wise man, always to hope the *best*, and at the same time to be prepared for the *worst*. But the new philosophy of the present day, is to reverse every maxim ; they take away our *hope*, but they cannot meet our *fears*. Is the sceptic *quite certain* there will be no hereafter ? He cannot ; it is a contradiction in terms for *him* who doubts all things, to be *sure* of *any*. Should he be wrong ? — — But I need not press the point : It is obvious *we* lose nothing by being prepared, were there no *last enemy* to encounter ; but *they* lose their all : for to be careless, is to be defenceless ; and to be defenceless, is to be undone.

Hence then, thou deluded Deist. Cease, with thy chilling touch to torpify each sense. No longer distil thy doctrine which like the blasting mildew on the rising plant, nips its shoot. Attempt not to undermine the edifice of christianity.

Take

Take not away what it is the purpose of religion to afford—*A Balsam for the wounds of the heart*†; but see that it is thy best wisdom to submit to God's. *Prepare to meet thy God!* Prepare each heart—not with *rivers of oil, or thousands of rams*—not with *works of righteousness which we have done*—but pleading that mercy which is for the miserable, that blood which *cleanses from all manner of sin*, which “sprinkled o’er the burning throne, has turned God’s wrath to grace.” *up for thy life! escape to the mountain, tarry not in the plain lest thou be consumed*†! *Flee to the Zoar of Salvation, Jesus Christ the righteous!* hid in the clefts of his side, you shall only at a distance see the lightning flash, and hear the thunder roll, while pardon, peace, and joy eternally abound.—Once more, we are taught,

6. *Patience.*—Believing soul! thy God *will not always tarry*; but while he *tarryes wait for him*. I am addressing those, who having found Jesus as their *Saviour*, cannot fear Him as their *Judge*. Such, amidst their troubles, trials, difficulties in
this

† —*Ægris Mortalibus.*—Virgil. † Gen. xix. 17.

this world, would rejoice to *flee away and be at rest, and hasten to their escape from the stormy wind and tempest**. Your language is *Make haste my beloved, and be thou like a young roe upon the mountain of spices †*: Soon, your God will come with a recompence and he will save you : meanwhile, let *patience* have its perfect work, and see that ye *walk circumspectly ‡*. Your *light* is not merely to twinkle or glimmer, it is to *shine* before men ; that *they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven||*. The Lord is making a visible separation between the wheat and the chaff, *the tares* will soon be *bound in bundles and cast into the fire§*. Persecution is trying some, pleasure is decoying others ; but blessed is he that *endureth to the end a*. *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life b!* Go forward, *for all behind, is lamentation and mourning and woe c*. Remember *Lot's wife d*; and let not your love grow cold ; *quench not the spirit ; but be ever looking unto*

* Psa. lv. 8. † Cant. viii. 14. ‡ Ephes. v. 15.
 || Matth. v. 16. § Matth. xiii. 30. a. Matth. x. 22.
 b. Rev. ii. 10. c. Ezek. ii. 10. d. Luke xvii. 37.

unto Jesus e, and then you need never "fear", for when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee†.—Soon, the last of God's elect will be gathered. And then the Trumpet sounds and the dead are raised incorruptible||. Then shall you behold him coming in the clouds and great glory, whom on earth men despised and rejected; his throne like the fiery flames, and his wheels as the burning fire, thousand thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him§.—Amongst this congregation of the righteous, may every soul here present stand! escaped the everlasting "FLAME." may we "FEAR" NOT, knowing that our complete redemption draweth nigh*.

e. Heb. xii 2. † Isa. xliii. 2. || 1 Cor. xv. 52.

§ Dan. viii 4.—10. * Luke, xxi. 18.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Title. read Joel, ii. 1.

P. 11. line, 1 — dreads.

14. — 7 — might.

25. — 14 — dispirits.

29. — 4 — roaring

The marks in the text and notes of p. 19, do not correspond, these and other lesser Errata, the Reader is requested to correct and excuse.

HIGH. WYCOMBE: PRINTED BY S. CAVE

(73)

By the same Author.

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